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ABSTRACT

There are currently no significant policies or programs to address the underrepresentation of males in the early childhood and primary education teaching profession in New Zealand. This paper examines the reasons for male underrepresentation and presents arguments for and against the employment of male teachers in these fields. Reasons cited for the dearth of male teachers include the media spotlight on allegations of sexual abuse of children; the stereotype of child care as women's work and labeling of men caregivers as homosexual or not "real men"; and the low wages, low social status, and small career structure within the field. Arguments in favor of increasing the number of male teachers in early childhood education relate to the impact of male teachers on children's activities, interactions, and learning; and men's need to be allowed to take responsibility for children and to be seen to be involved in children's care. Arguments against the employment of male teachers in early childhood relate to the possibility of child abuse, the ability of women to show masculine traits, and the tendency of male teachers to be principals-in-training. The paper concludes that the dearth of male teachers is a problems and that it should be addressed. Vigorous debate on the problem, facilitated by the media, is needed to challenge social views on the appropriateness of men as teachers of young children. Employers and training providers must join with policy makers and administrators to develop a nationally coordinated approach to obtaining and retaining male teachers. Contains 31 references. (KB)

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ARE MALE TEACHERS REALLY NECESSARY?

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ABSTRACT: Men are massively under-represented in the early childhood teaching profession and less than one quarter of primary school teachers are male. There are no significant policies or programmes in place to address this under-representation. Does this mean that it is not necessary to have men teaching and caring for young children? This paper looks at the reasons for male under-representation, and presents a set of arguments for and against male teachers. It is concluded that the dearth of male teachers is a problem and that it should be addressed. Vigorous debate, facilitated by the media, on the problem is needed to challenge social views on the appropriateness of men as teachers of young children. Employers and training providers must join with policy-makers and administrators to develop a nationally coordinated approach to getting and retaining male teachers.

THE STATISTICS

Early childhood teaching is one of the most gender-segregated occupations in New Zealand society- it is an almost exclusively female occupation. From the early 1980s men started to be accepted into kindergarten teacher training. By 1992 0.7 percent of kindergarten teachers were male and 2.6 percent of childcare centre staff were male. Men tended to apply for positions in childcare centres in preference to kindergartens. To gain a position in a kindergarten it was necessary to first face training selection panels, and then to undertake two years of full-time training within a female environment. Male participation in kindergarten teaching increased slightly by 1996 (up to 1.1 %) but the percentage of male childcare workers decreased significantly (down to 1.4%). Across the two early childhood services the percentage of male to female teachers in full-time equivalent positions in 1992 was 2.1 percent, falling to 1.3 percent in 1995, and decreasing very slightly to 1.2 percent in 1997.

Male flight from primary school teaching is also apparent in statistics collected by the Ministry of Education. In 1971 there was a reasonable balance of male and female teachers on the staff of most state primary schools, as 37.8 percent of teachers were male. By 1995 the percentage of male primary school teachers had decreased to 22.3 percent and by 1997 to 20.7 percent. In contrast to other developed countries New Zealand has one of the lowest rates of male participation in early childhood teaching. The situation in New Zealand is comparable only to that of the United Kingdom where census results showed childcare work was the most gender segregated occupation, with 98 percent of staff being female (Jensen, 1996). In the United States a national survey of childcare staff showed that men made up 3 percent of staff in childcare centres (Child Care Employee Project, 1989). Men make up approximately 3 percent of staff in centres for children aged birth to 6 years in Sweden, 8 percent of staff in public services for children aged birth to 6 years in Spain, 5 percent of staff in centres for children aged birth to 3 years in Denmark and 9 percent in centres for children aged 3 to 6 years (Jensen, 1996).

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REASONS FOR THE DEARTH OF MALE TEACHERS

The main reasons why men are scarce in early childhood and primary school teaching are covered in this section. The contemporary reasons are: (a) social phobia about men working with young children because it is believed that all men are potential child molesters and men do not want to run the risk of false accusation by becoming teachers, and (b) the feminist movement and public support for women's employment opportunities but not for men's. Traditional reasons for men not becoming involved in the care and education of young children are to do with: (a) beliefs about the roles of men and women, and (b) the working conditions and social status of early childhood teaching and more recently primary teaching.

SPOTLIGHT ON SEX ABUSES CASES

This decade has seen considerable movement towards greater male participation in traditionally female dominated jobs such as nursing, secretarial, and cabin crew work, but this has not happened in early childhood teaching. About 40 percent of Air New Zealand cabin crew staff are male. They are no longer called air hostesses and the airline encourages males to apply (Schaer, 1996). The spotlight on two cases of sexual abuse in childcare centres is largely to blame for the drop in number of male early childhood teachers after 1992, according to 40 male and female kindergarten and childcare teachers (Farquhar, 1997). Before 1992 the early childhood field also welcomed men, although men were not actively encouraged and supported as they are in say nursing and airline work. However male teachers now report that they are looked upon with suspicion and are often discriminated against when applying for jobs (Farquhar, 1997). Education Minister Wyatt Creech has stated that while the "highly publicised sexual abuse cases had generated 'dreadful PR' for male teachers ... he doubted the Government could do much to aid the situation" (EDUVAC, 1997, p. 1). The New Zealand Educational Institute, which represents early childhood and primary teachers, has denied that sex abuse fears are keeping men out (Tocker, 1997).

Since initial allegations of the sexual abuse of children by Peter Ellis at the Christchurch Civic Child Care Centre surfaced in November 1991 the media has given the Ellis case considerable attention. The court case was the longest running one for sexual abuse in New Zealand's history, and attempts to have the 10 year conviction over-turned at the Court of Appeal and at the Privy Council kept the case in the media spotlight. Most recently, the 20/20 television feature on the Ellis case raised serious doubts about his guilt. While most male teachers are likely to welcome a move to clear Ellis's name, debate about this in the media is continuing to remind men of the risks and stigma associated with working with young children.

National early childhood organisations, including the New Zealand Educational Institute, developed protocols and guidelines for early childhood teachers to reduce the possibility of being accused of child sex abuse. These various guidelines were developed in response to the sex abuse cases and serve to further remind male teachers that they can not be trusted because of their gender (Farquhar, 1997). For example, one male teacher quoted in Farquhar's study said "dressing and undressing (children) never used to be a problem but now we are teaching children that it is a problem when a man teacher is there" (p. 33).

STEREOTYPE OF CHILDCARE AS WOMEN'S WORK AND LABELLING OF MEN WHO DO IT AS GAY OR NOT "REAL MEN"

In society, young children are viewed as women's responsibility to care for and to nurture. The lack of male involvement in early childhood education therefore reflects gender roles in the wider society. Australian research by Grbich (1992) shows that when fathers become the primary caregivers of their children they are marginalised in society. They are called names such as "poofs" and "queers". Women and breadwinner males avoid talking with them and ostracise them.

Like the fathers in Grbich's study, New Zealand male teachers are given a hard time by others. Van Deursen's (1989) survey of 17 male childcare teachers in New Zealand shows that the "flack" they received because they were men was very discouraging. Naish (1995) interviewed six male early childhood teachers and found that they were not encouraged at High School or supported at Teachers' College to be early childhood teachers. Naish argues that the view that caring for children is not a suitable job for men is still prevalent in society. Farquhar (1997) reports that male kindergarten and childcare teachers experience less support than female teachers from their families and peers for their decision to work with young children. For example, one female teacher said that people were pleased with her choice of occupation because it was a good one for a girl. A male teacher said that his friends teased him and called him a "girl" and a "child molester". Male teachers reported that they were often regarded by parents and people in the community as being a homosexual especially if they were not married, whereas female teachers reported no such labeling.

Hoffman and Teyber (1985) argue that until there is more equal participation in the care of children by men and women, real change in traditional sex roles will not occur. However, this is a chicken and egg problem of what comes first - more men becoming involved in childcare despite the social pressures, or changes in social attitudes to allow men into the female domain. Equal employment opportunity policy does not seem to be an effective mechanism for improving the representation of men in early childhood education as it can be used to argue for the employment of female over male job applicants (Farquhar, 1997). All early childhood services and schools are required by the Ministry of Education to have an EEO policy but it is left up to individual employers whether they regard men as a special target group because men are not one of the designated target groups under EEO legislation (National Radio, 1997).

WAGES, STATUS, AND CAREER STRUCTURE

The low wages, low social status and small career structure within the early childhood field are inter-related factors which mean that many men would never even consider early childhood teaching as an occupation (Farquhar, 1995). The older the child being cared for and taught the higher the pay and social status. Hence there are more male teachers in primary teaching than in early childhood, and more males in secondary than in primary teaching. Primary teachers are currently seeking pay parity with secondary teachers, and one outcome of this is likely to be an increase in the number of male teachers within primary schools, according to the president of the Principals' Federation Nola Hambelton (EDUVAC, 1997).

Men tend to be the main breadwinners in the family and so wage-level is important to men (Jensen,1996). Men working in the early childhood sector are more likely than women to be the main income earner in their household (Farquhar, 1997). Although money is important to men as a group, Farquhar's 1997 research suggests that for individual men the low level of remuneration does not deter them from becoming teachers as they hold other rewards to be important, such as the satisfaction of knowing that they are making a positive difference to the views of children about the roles of men.

WOMEN, AND NOT MEN, ARE SEEN TO BE DISADVANTAGED

In both primary and early childhood education a major difficulty in increasing the participation rate of men is that women as a group are disadvantaged within the labour market and experience discrimination. Over recent years primary school teaching has become a strong women's occupation due to equal employment opportunity policy favoring women in applications for initial positions and for promotion. Many schools are now staffed only by women teachers and even employ female caretakers (EDVAC, 1997). The early childhood sector provides significant employment opportunities for women. The lack of male participation in the sector is rarely discussed for fear that the entry of men into the sector could threaten women's jobs (Clyde, 1995).

THE ARGUMENTS

There are arguments both for and against the employment of male teachers. The arguments for male teachers can be grouped into three main categories: (1) the importance of a male influence during children's early years of development, (2) the differences male teachers make to children's activities, interactions and learning, and (3) men's need to be allowed to take responsibility for children and to be seen to be involved in children's care. The arguments against male teachers seem weak in comparison. One argument against male teachers is that they are likely to sexually abuse young children because this occurs in the wider society and there have been two cases in childcare centres this decade. However, when this argument is examined closely it can be seen to be discriminatory and unjustified if there are policies and procedures in place to safeguard children. Two further arguments have been voiced by women teachers and leaders in education to the writer of this paper in response to the findings of a report on men in early childhood services (Farquhar, 1997). These arguments are first that when men do enter teaching they only go for the top positions and limit women's access to power within their own profession, and second that male teachers can not offer anything in the curriculum that female teachers are not already providing, like showing children how to fix a cart wheel or kick a rugby ball. These two arguments are also weak and reflect a lack of recognition that while individual women and men vary in their personal attributes, men as a group differ from women as a group, with each group having different needs, interests, and abilities.

FOR MALE TEACHERS

1. Providing a Male Influence During the Formative Years of Development

The popular argument in support of male teachers is that children need to have a male role model during their early years of education, especially if they do not have a father or are brought up mainly by their mother (Daily News Editor, 1997; Langley, Christchurch College of Education liaison officer quoted by Webber, 1997; Otago Daily Times Editor, 1997). Further, male teachers are claimed to be good for providing boys and girls whose "fathers" are constantly changing with a stable positive male figure (Jensen, 1996). Exposure to positive male role-models during the early years is believed to be a panacea to social problems such as higher rates of youth suicide, boys' academic achievement levels slipping in comparison to girls', and a rise in school bullying and truancy amongst boys (Martin, 1996; Morgan, 1997). Research indicates that boys are more likely to admire and copy male teachers rather than female teachers (Gold & Reis, 1982). Social learning theory supports the popular belief about the importance of the "male" influence on the development of children's behaviour and attitudes up to about the age of eight years (Holmes, 1996; Lamb, 1981).

2. Benefiting Children's Learning

Theory and research suggests that male teachers make a beneficial contribution to children's intellectual and social development in two ways: first through children's observation of them, and second through the way male teachers interact and work with children. Contact with and observation of male teachers allows boys and girls to see that men can be as capable as women in caring for and teaching young children (Clyde, 1995). Conversely, an absence of men in early childhood centres and primary school classrooms leaves children with the impression that men can not be involved in such work or carry out such roles. Male teachers can assist boys and girls to develop their ideas of masculinity, and this is something that women can not do (Morgan, 1997; King 1994).

In settings where male teachers are employed girls are affected more than boys in their choice of activities and all children engage more with activities involving construction and movement (Jensen, 1996). Male teachers also mean an increase in dialogue between children and adults and an increase in social games (Jensen, 1996). A major reason for having male teachers is that through their example boys learn that they can be more caring (Farquhar, 1997). In addition, boys interests and needs, such as for more boisterous play, are respected and catered for in a way that is difficult to achieve when the staff group is all female (Farquhar, 1997; Jensen, 1996).

3. Taking Responsibility and Participating in Childcare

The entry of men into early childhood teaching openly demonstrates to other men and women that men are capable of taking responsibility for children. After the publication of research on male teachers in New Zealand (Farquhar, 1997) a number of letters were received by the researcher from fathers explaining their difficulty in achieving custody and access to their children because of society's bias towards children being kept with their mothers. A letter to the Editor of the Evening Standard newspaper by Tomlinson (1997) of the Family Rights group stated:

> *We of Family Rights believe the removal of bias against fathers in the Family Court needs to be addressed to allow the positive parenting input of both father and mother. As fathers wanting this, our pleadings are ignored. Hopefully Dr Farquhar's report will not be.*

Meyerhoff (1994) argues that women often unconsciously discourage men from being present and involved with children. Research findings show that mothers and female teachers can become more aware of their own sexism through having contact with a male teacher, and that after working with a male teacher women prefer to have a man on the staff (Farquhar, 1997; Skeen, Robinson & Coleman, 1986).

A man on the teaching staff provides a signal to fathers that men are welcome in the early childhood centre setting or school and that men can play a part in children's care and education (Farquhar, 1997). Unfortunately, men tend to draw back from contact and involvement with young children because of the mistaken belief that they are less capable than women due to their gender (Meyerhoff, 1994). Buck (1985) suggests that the lack of men in early childhood teaching and the low level of fathers' involvement in child-rearing are inter-related problems and that an increase in male teachers should help to increase fathers' participation in their children's care.

AGAINST MALE TEACHERS

1. Men Sexually Abuse Children

In New Zealand, as in the United Kingdom, a few cases of child sex abuse in childcare services have been used as an argument against the appointment of male staff (Farquhar, 1997; Jensen, 1996). Jensen (1996) argues that it is wrong that men's sexuality is focused on and that this does not occur at all with women. If men are to be restricted from working with young children because of the actions of some individual men then why does this argument not also apply to women. The little publicised conviction of a Hamilton woman for sexual violation of a child in 1996, the convictions of two Hamilton women childcare workers for physical assaults on children in 1996 and the police charging of a woman caregiver with the death of a 17 month girl by physical assault in 1997 suggest double standards towards abuse and abusers (Evening Post, 1995; Wellwood, 1996). Good screening procedures for job applicants and abuse prevention policies and practices should safeguard children from sexual abuse by male **and** female teachers.

2. Women Can Do What Men do

In the 1980s the concept of androgyny supported the participation of men in early childhood teaching because men could show children that they can perform a non-traditional role. Similarly, to break down traditional gender roles women were needed who were interested in doing "male" activities such as supporting children with wood-work and maths and science activities. Thus, it was argued that either a man or a woman could "prepare snacks for children, soothe a grazed knee, play ball with children or oversee activities at the woodwork bench' (Robinson, 1981, p. 29).

It follows that an argument for not promoting teaching as an occupation for men is that women can show masculine traits and therefore men do not need to be employed for this purpose. However, children need identification figures and a female teacher can not be a male role model. Children do not do what we say they should do, but they do what they see we do. Further, Jensen (1996) argues that it is hard to imagine female teachers showing the same interest in rough and tumble and physical play as male teachers. Male and female teachers perform similar work and both care for children, but they have different caring cultures and care in different ways (Jensen, 1996).

Huttunen's (1992) study of children's experiences and memories of their early childhood programme indicates that female teachers can not take the place of male teachers, and that male teachers are important for quality from the perspective of boys. To quote Huttunen:

> *All in all boys were more critical about early childhood programs than girls. Girls remembered their caregivers' personalities with more love than boys. Maybe one reason for that is that programs are planned and run mostly by women and it is easier for girls to understand a woman's world, respect her personality and agree with her style on guiding activities (p. 13).*

3. Men Take the Top Positions From Women

It is unfair to stereotype all men who teach as principals in-training according to King (1995), but this is an argument used by women in education against the entry of men into teaching. It is true that proportionately there are more male than female primary school principals, but when it is considered that men are more likely to be supporting other family members on their income it is understandable that they move quickly to higher paying positions. Men working in early childhood services are also more likely than their female colleagues to be the breadwinner (Farquhar, 1997).

The very small number of men working in early childhood education means when a male is employed in a senior position he stands out because it is so unusual for men to be in the field. In the early 1990s some male teachers who loved teaching felt forced to apply for senior positions which involved little child contact because they were scared of being falsely accused of child sex abuse. Another reason why men tend to move into senior positions is that because they are a minority group they can feel pressured to prove themselves through working harder than their female colleagues (Farquhar, 1997).

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DISCUSSION

To question whether women should be in a male dominated occupation would be criticised as being politically incorrect and discriminatory, yet it is possible to question whether men should be teachers of young children. Society has a long way to go before the difficulties that men encounter are taken seriously and recognised to be of as much concern as the difficulties women experience in employment. To simply say that men do not want to work with young children would be like saying that women do not want to be pilots, engineers or company directors.

The arguments against male teachers are weak and the arguments for male teachers clearly indicate that they are important for children and to break down traditional gender roles. Vigorous debate is needed in the media, and amongst policy-makers and education administrators on male participation in early childhood and primary school teaching (Jensen, 1996). One of the key reasons why there are so few men in early childhood education and why the number of men in primary teaching continues to fall is that education groups and administrators do not discuss this and therefore nothing is being done about it. Employers and training providers should take responsibility for the lack of male teachers, and policy makers and administrators should be proactive in joining with employers and training providers to put in place a national plan for getting and retaining more male teachers.

There is no evidence showing that the work performance of male teachers is better than female teachers. There is in fact little difference in the work that female and male teachers do (Robinson, 1988). However, male and female teachers tend to be different in how they care, interact, and play with children (Jensen, 1996). It is not possible for female teachers to provide a male identification figure for children, or to demonstrate how men can care and be responsible for children.

The fact that the majority of men in Farquhar's (1997) study of early childhood teachers were primary household income earners suggests that money is more important to men than it is to women. An improvement in wages would be one way of raising the status of teaching and at the same time attract more men into the profession. Should Peter Ellis be pardoned it would be interesting to consider the impact this may have on attitudes towards men in early childhood education and whether men would be more willing to enter early childhood teaching.

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